

**Middle
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December 14, 2009

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei
Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran
c/o H.E. Mohammad Khazaee
Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations
Permanent Mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations
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Your Excellency,

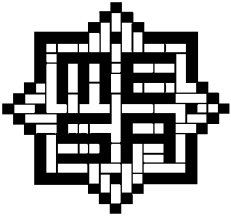
I am once again writing to you on behalf of the Committee on Academic Freedom (CAF) of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA). This time, we write to you in regard to the December 7, 2009, national Student Day anniversary in Iran, which was marked by large-scale violence carried out against protesting students across the country by the Iranian security forces.

MESA was founded in 1966 to promote scholarship and teaching on the Middle East and North Africa. The preeminent organization in the field, MESA publishes the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* and has more than 3000 members worldwide. MESA is committed to ensuring academic freedom and freedom of expression, both within the region and in connection with the study of the region in North America and elsewhere.

This is the sixth occasion on which we have written to you in 2009 to voice our profound concern and frustration with developments in Iran (for our previous letters, see: http://www.mesa.arizona.edu/caf/letters_iran.html#Iran091026).

In the weeks leading up to the December 7 national Student Day, Iranian authorities carried out a campaign of targeted intimidation against student activists, including “anonymous” threatening e-mails, and resorted to arresting student leaders, a number of them rounded up during domicile raids in the middle of the night. Those arbitrarily detained across the country in the period leading up to the Student Day anniversary have included members of the Office for Fostering [Student] Solidarity (daftar-e tahkim-e vahdat) and Liberal Students of Iranian Universities, among other targeted groups and individual activists at large. Moreover, for the past few months the authorities have stepped up the policy of militarizing the university campuses through the heavy presence of the Basij militia units (with a corresponding expansion of Basij recruitment efforts in many high schools around the country). To carry out its premeditated violence against the students on December 7, the Iranian government resorted to a news blackout and disruption of internet and other communication services. Still, some news of the large-scale suppression of student protests has reached the outside world.

Based on the limited available news, during the December 7 commemoration of Student Day on campuses throughout Iran, the assorted security forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran joined the campus security forces, which frequently receive directives from the infamous



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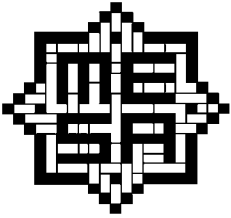
Ayatollah Ali Khamenei
December 14, 2009
Re: National Student Day
Page 2

Basij militia units, in brutally attacking unarmed student protesters with tear gas and an array of weapons, leading to many injuries and arrests. In an attempt to conceal from the public both the extent of student unrest on campuses as well as the magnitude of the security forces amassed at the entrance of the university campuses in preparation for the organized attacks against the students, the authorities made use of large banners draped around the campus entrances, as well as parked buses. Hundreds of students were rounded up in the violent nation-wide crackdown (at least over 200 in the capital alone, according to the Tehran police chief), with many still remaining in detention.

On December 8, the day after the Student Day anniversary, thousands of government security forces, joined by the Basij militia and the campus security forces, once again unleashed their wrath against activist students at a number of Iranian universities, launching sweeping unprovoked raids (including at the universities of Tehran and Shahid Beheshti in the capital) and engaging in violent acts ranging from tear-gassing the buildings and storming the classrooms to physical assaults (using stun guns, batons, metal bars, and even broken glass, among other weapons) and arresting scores of students. Subsequent clashes between the security forces and students have taken place on other university campuses across the country at the instigation of the security forces.

In short, the Islamic Republic has succeeded in creating an unprecedented reign of terror on Iranian university campuses. The government has ironically transformed every annual Student Day commemoration of the original 1953 killing of three students at the University of Tehran by the last shah's security forces into renewed and more vicious episodes of terrorizing students. In effect, every annual Student Day itself is now commemorated anew for the extensive victimization of students by the authorities. We remind you again that currently the Islamic Republic of Iran ranks as one of the worst state violators of the basic and constitutionally-guaranteed rights of freedom of opinion and expression, with a fast-deteriorating record of wholesale assault on academic and intellectual freedom as well as persecution of non-violent student activists and scholars; including routine acts of intimidation, expulsion, detention, arbitrary sentencing without access to due process of law, harsh interrogations and torture, and killing of non-violent student activists, as well as harassment, dismissal, forced early retirement, and arrests of faculty members on ideological grounds. We also would like to remind you that on December 8, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms. Navi Pillay, issued a letter to the Iranian government, reproaching it for intensifying its repressive measures and for its lack of tolerance toward dissenting views.

We find it additionally reprehensible that, on December 8, the regime's notoriously hard-line prosecutor general (and former chief of the Intelligence Ministry, who has been linked by many independent human rights observers to numerous cases of torture and deaths in detention), Gholam-Hussein Mohseni-Ejei, announced that in future the families of arrested protesters may be denied the right of appeal (which is in violation of Iranian law). Moreover, notwithstanding the repeated warnings ahead of the December 7 Student Day by various officials and the chiefs of Iranian security forces and the Basij militia, to the



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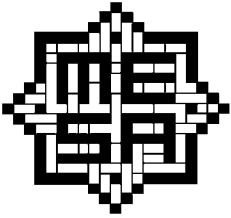
Ayatollah Ali Khamenei
December 14, 2009
Re: National Student Day
Page 3

effect that protesters will be dealt with by the full and unmitigated force of the state, we find equally disturbing the prosecutor general's statement purporting that "Iranian security forces so far have exercised great self-restraint when dealing with protesters." Leaving aside the general level of brutality exhibited by the Iranian security forces, particularly since June 2009, it baffles the imagination to consider how many more unarmed students must be shot and killed in cold blood in their dormitory rooms, how many thousands more non-violent student activists and protesters must be beaten, detained, and subjected to torture, before the prosecutor general finally concedes that the security forces have abandoned all self-restraint and are dealing with protesters in a ruthless manner. We regard such statements by Iranian officials as nothing short of additional public intimidation and the escalation of the regime of repression.

Given such statements, we are gravely concerned with the judiciary's treatment of the detained student activists. In light of the statements made by the prosecutor general and the already incurred notoriety of the Islamic Republic for routinely illicit and heavy-handed treatment of student activists, we are extremely anxious about the well-being of the detained students, the range of fabricated charges that may be brought against them, and their right to fair trial in the event formal charges are filed against them. We are particularly concerned with the treatment of the many student leaders detained as part of targeted arrests leading up to and since the Student Day anniversary, among them Abbas Hakimzadeh of Amir Kabir University in Tehran (arrested on November 19, and having served a prior sentence for his peaceful student activism), Babak Ghiyasi of Razi University in Kermanshah (abducted on December 1), Milad Assadi of Khaje Nasir Toosi Technical University in Tehran (arrested on December 2), Majid Tavakoli (arrested on December 7 at Amir Kabir University in Tehran, and having served two prior prison sentence for his non-violent student activism), and Sohrab Karimi of Tehran University (arrested at home in his hometown of Qurwa on December 8, and also having served two prior prison sentences for his activities). In addition, in recent weeks the authorities have stepped up their harassment and arrests of members of the university students' alumni association known as Advar.

We also continue to be concerned about the fate of our internationally-respected colleague Dr. Kian Tajbakhsh, and the former chancellor of the University of Tehran, Dr. Mohammad Maleki, who remain in detention since their arrests last summer, with both of them having served prior prison sentences on unsubstantiated charges. Dr. Tajbakhsh was arrested on July 9 and sentenced to more than 12 years on October 20 on the clearly mendacious charge of endangering national security. The Revolutionary Court has announced recently that additional charges are being brought against Dr. Tajbakhsh. Dr. Maleki, the first post-revolution chancellor of the University of Tehran, who is seventy-six years old and suffers from advanced prostate cancer, was taken from his home on August 22 on as-of-yet unclear charges. His trial got underway on December 12.

The continued callous attitude of Iranian authorities toward wide-scale official infringements of basic academic rights and peaceful freedom of expression (in contravention of both the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Iranian constitution) will not



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Ayatollah Ali Khamenei
December 14, 2009
Re: National Student Day
Page 4

shield the Iranian regime from future criticism or stringent monitoring by MESA. We very much hope that your government's emissary at the United Nations, the ambassador Mr. Mohammad Khazaei, has been faithfully conveying our correspondence to you and that you will take the time to read our letters and respond. MESA will continue to document and publicize violations of academic freedom by the Iranian authorities.

We urge you again to immediately halt all unwarranted repressive measures against non-violent dissenting students, faculty, and scholars at large; to free all detained students and scholars serving sentences for non-violent expression of opinion, and to assure their well-being and full access to independent legal representation and due process of law while they remain in detention; to fully investigate and prosecute the officials and security agents responsible for unprovoked acts of intimidation and violence directed against student protesters and academics; and to provide full public guarantee of the basic rights of freedom of expression and opinion, as well as the right of students and faculty to organize independent associations and engage in peaceful assembly on Iranian university campuses. As the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, you are ultimately responsible for the actions of Iranian government officials, including the president, and the security forces, including the Basij militia.

Sincerely,

Roger M.A. Allen
MESA President
Professor of Arabic & Comparative Literature, University of Pennsylvania